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S E C R E T ROME 001173

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STATE FOR INR AND EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2013

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SUBJECT: GOI WILL DO WHAT IT CAN TO LIMIT IRAQI OFFICIAL
PRESENCE IN ITALY

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM EMIL SKODON. REASON:1.5 (B)(D)

1. (U) GUIDANCE REQUEST. SEE PARA 6.

2. (S) SUMMARY: ON MARCH 20, MFA CHIEF OF CABINET CESARE RAGAGLINI SAID THAT THOSE INDIVIDUALS IN THE IRAQI INTEREST SECTION IN ROME IDENTIFIED AS INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS COULD BE EXPELLED IMMEDIATELY. HE WONDERED IF THERE WOULD BE SOME UTILITY IN ALLOWING THE CHARGE', WHO THE MFA BELIEVES IS NOT WITH THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, TO REMAIN. RAGAGLINI ALSO POINTED OUT THAT IRAQ'S EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE, WHICH THE GOI CANNOT LEGALLY CLOSE, WOULD STILL HAVE ACCESS TO BANK ACCOUNTS AND OTHER GOI RESOURCES. END SUMMARY.

3. (S) DRAWING ON POINTS REFTTEL, POLMIN UNDERLINED WITH RAGAGLINI THE IMPORTANCE OF LIMITING THE OFFICIAL IRAQI PRESENCE IN ITALY. POLMIN HIGHLIGHTED THE POTENTIAL USE OF THE IRAQI INTEREST SECTION (UNDER SUDANESE DIPLOMATIC PROTECTION) AS A BASE FOR TERRORIST OPERATIONS, AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT OFFICIALS OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT WOULD PLUNDER PROPERTY WHICH RIGHTLY BELONGS TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE AND DESTROY DIPLOMATIC RECORDS SHOULD IT BECOME APPARENT THAT THE REGIME IN BAGHDAD WAS ABOUT TO CRUMBLE.

4. (S) RAGAGLINI AGREED THAT THOSE INDIVIDUALS IN THE IRAQI MISSION IDENTIFIED AS INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS COULD BE EXPELLED IMMEDIATELY. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE CHARGE', THAT WOULD INCLUDE ALL IRAQI EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING THE DRIVER. RAGAGLINI WONDERED IF THERE WOULD BE SOME UTILITY IN ALLOWING THE CHARGE' TO REMAIN, GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE MFA BELIEVES THAT HE IS NOT/NOT AN INTELLIGENCE OFFICER. (COMMENT: RAGAGLINI, WHO ONCE SERVED AS CHARGE IN BAGHDAD, APPEARS PERSONALLY CONVINCED THAT THE CHARGE HERE, FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF TO TARIQ AZIZ, IS NOT A PROFESSIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER). HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT ALL OF THESE INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING THE CHARGE', COULD REQUEST POLITICAL ASYLUM. RAGAGLINI SAID THAT THE FINAL DECISION ON PNG AND INTEREST SECTION CLOSURE WOULD BE TAKEN BY FM FRATTINI, WHO IS CURRENTLY IN BRUSSELS WITH THE PM FOR THE EU COUNCIL.

5. (S) THE OTHER COMPLICATING FACTOR IS THE IRAQI EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE, OVER WHICH THE GOI HAS LITTLE OR NO CONTROL. THE GOI WOULD DO WHAT IT COULD, PROMISED RAGAGLINI, BUT THE PRESENCE IN THE VATICAN MEANS THAT AS FAR AS ITALY IS CONCERNED, CLOSING THE INTEREST SECTION IN ROME WOULD HAVE LITTLE OR NO PRACTICAL EFFECT ON THE GOALS SPELLED OUT IN REFTTEL POINTS. THE EMBASSY TO THE VATICAN, WHICH IS CO-LOCATED WITH THE BILATERAL DIPLOMATS, WOULD HAVE ACCESS TO BANK ACCOUNTS AND OTHER RESOURCES, UNLESS THE GOI COULD PROVE THAT THEY WERE TO BE USED FOR TERRORIST OR OTHER ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES. RAGAGLINI WILL ASK ITALIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES TO LOOK INTO THE NATURE OF AND AMOUNTS IN THESE ACCOUNTS. THE ONE BENEFIT FROM THE EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE REMAINING OPEN IS THAT IT COULD TAKE CARE OF THE CONSULAR NEEDS OF IRAQI NATIONALS IN ITALY.

6. (S) FOR DEPARTMENT: WE NOTE THAT EMBASSY VATICAN WAS NOT REQUESTED TO UNDERTAKE REFTTEL DEMARCHE. EMBASSY VATICAN BELIEVES THE HOLY SEE WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO CLOSE THE IRAQI MISSION, GIVEN THE CONTINUED OPERATION OF THEIR OWN MISSION IN BAGHDAD AND THEIR FEAR OF REPRISALS AGAINST CHALDEAN CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ. IN LIGHT OF BOTH THE COMPLICATIONS NOTED ABOVE AND THE LIKELY HOLY SEE ATTITUDE, WE WOULD ASK THE DEPARTMENT TO REVIEW WHETHER AN APPROACH TO THE HOLY SEE TO CLOSE THE IRAQI EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE WOULD BE ADVISABLE.

7. (U) THIS CABLE WAS CLEARED BY BOTH EMBASSY ROME AND EMBASSY VATICAN

SEMBLER

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2003ROME01173 - Classification: SECRET